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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNT #0965/01 2331230  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 201230Z AUG 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0186  
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 4292  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0506  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4909  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0765  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0532  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0788  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4493  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2784  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0804  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7547  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1443  
RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR 0184  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC 0345  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2747  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC 0196  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0337  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2011  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1419  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000965

SIPDIS

FOR CENTCOM GENERAL DEMPSEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/20/2018

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UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: SCENESETTER FOR THE VISIT OF CENTCOM  
GENERAL DEMPSEY

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Embassy Tashkent warmly welcomes your visit to Uzbekistan as an important opportunity to cement recent improvements in U.S.-Uzbekistan cooperation. Recent months have shown increasing dialogue and net improvements in the relationship, particularly in the defense and security sectors. During your visit you will meet with a select group of senior Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) officials. We ask that you encourage the Government of Uzbekistan to cooperate with the U.S. across a variety of fronts, particularly with regard to further support of our stabilization goals in Afghanistan, counternarcotics cooperation, and additional steps in human rights. As noted in other reporting, Karimov is a president in control. Nevertheless, he is also in his third and quite possibly final presidential term. The political undercurrents of succession preparations are quiet but clear; now is a time when the messages we send and the relationships we cultivate matter. End summary.

Civility Restored in Bilateral Relations  
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¶2. (C) U.S.-Uzbekistan relations have regained in the past year a level of civility. Harassment of Embassy personnel has largely ceased; our officers and local staff are able to travel and to meet with contacts on a regular basis. Our NGO partners have told us that they have been given the green light by Government of Uzbekistan authorities to meet with us and resume normal relations. Some problems continue, but across the Government of Uzbekistan, contacts with the Embassy have picked up. Ambassador Norland has met privately with President Karimov four times (once with Central Command's Admiral Fallon) and has had several other encounters. Karimov has in every instance underscored his

interest in positive relations, and indeed, recently stated that we are moving beyond merely "restoring relations."

Uzbekistan-Afghanistan Relations, Northern Ground Line of Communication  
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13. (C) The Government of Uzbekistan has expressed serious concerns about the security situation in Afghanistan, particularly with regard to dramatic increases in drug production and increasing Taliban activity, and the potential for spillover into Uzbekistan. While senior Government of Uzbekistan officials have repeatedly indicated their lack of faith in President Karzai, and are pessimistic about the results of international efforts thus far, they are clearly interested in seeing improved stability there. Uzbekistan has indicated that achieving this depends on a multifaceted strategy encompassing socioeconomic development of the country and agreement among major stakeholders. During the April 2-4 North Atlantic Treaty Organization/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council summit in Bucharest, President Karimov floated a "6 plus 3" proposal recommending the creation of a United Nations-administered "Contact Group" consisting of the states bordering Afghanistan--Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan--plus Russia, the United States, and NATO. The proposal is not our preferred vehicle, as it does not include representatives from the Government of Afghanistan in the group. At the end of April, Tashkent also hosted a large-scale international conference dedicated to addressing the security situation in Afghanistan and promoting a regional approach to the problems there, which underscores the GOU's continuing concerns and may foreshadow additional gatherings devoted to regional security.

14. (C) Currently, some sixty percent of aviation fuel necessary for Coalition operations in Afghanistan passes by rail through Uzbekistan. Ninety-nine percent of all of the fuel that Afghanistan's aviation forces use, and tons of bottled water for our troops in Afghanistan each month, also transit Uzbekistan's territory. Uzbekistan is a vital and relatively secure logistical pipeline in support of operations in Afghanistan now and offers the potential of becoming even more important in the near term given its favorable geographic position and transportation infrastructure and given continued instability in Pakistan. The Government of Uzbekistan continues to invest considerable resources into improving and expanding its railroad infrastructure, and the state joint stock company Uzbekistan Railroad has upgraded many of its Soviet-inherited rail facilities and built new lines between Nukus and Navoi and between Karshi and Termez. Uzbekistan Railroad's lines terminate in Hayraton, Afghanistan in the northern Balkh Province, which provides easy and safe access to Bagram Airbase and other U.S./NATO operating points in eastern Afghanistan.

15. (SBU) On January 29, the Government of Uzbekistan approved the use of the Uzbekistani-German Termez Airbase as a transit point into Afghanistan for U.S. personnel assigned to NATO and/or International Security Assistance Force missions. Uzbekistan has since indicated that it is willing to expand the currently limited "case by case" permission granted in this initial agreement to a blanket one, like the one the Germans exercise now, but are asking for a diplomatic note from German authorities to formalize the agreement. This effort is pending. This expansion of the current "Termez Bridge" agreement promises a much-needed alternate route for moving U.S. personnel supporting operations in Afghanistan.

16. (C) The USG is hoping to follow the German Government's and NATO's model in securing a transit agreement to transport critical non-lethal goods across Uzbekistan in support of operations in Afghanistan. The transit agreement would provide an important alternate logistical route into Afghanistan as well as a safeguard to limits on the current primary supply conduit through Pakistan. Recent transit problems with numerous contractor-controlled DOD shipments

becoming held up due to issues with the State Customs Committee underscore the need for such an agreement. DAO recommendation: During recent U.S.-Uzbekistan security assistance consultative talks in Tampa, J4 CC BG Dowd discussed the possibility of a NGLOC agreement with Uzbekistan's Deputy Defense Minister Niyazov and proposed a follow-up October 2008 visit to Uzbekistan. We recommend raising this possible visit as an ideal opportunity to lay out the framework for a U.S.-Uzbekistan NGLOC agreement based on the pending NATO and existing German agreements.

¶7. (SBU) Uzbekistan has indicated its willingness to provide electricity to Afghanistan and hopes to complete construction of a 43-km link between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan within the next six months. A round of Afghanistan-Uzbekistan talks took place in April on construction of the 220 KV power transmission line from the Surkhan substation in Uzbekistan to the Afghan border. A group of Uzbek engineers traveled to Afghanistan in early June and inspected the Afghan-built 220KV line from the border to Kabul. We have heard that their inspection left them fully satisfied. Although the Afghans were given to believe that construction of the Uzbekistani transmission line would begin soon even in the absence of a formal agreement, we understand that construction has not yet begun. The sides have yet to settle on the price and terms of the electricity that Uzbekistan will sell to Afghanistan. During the April talks, the Uzbekistani side hinted that the Afghans should expect to pay much more than the \$0.04 kW/hr that it has paid for Uzbekistan's electricity in the past. A new round of talks is taking place during the week of August 18-22.

¶8. (SBU) The United States has contributed to efforts to enhance the security of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan border, and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) funded \$575,000 of a \$1,810,875 border security assistance project implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime at Hayraton checkpoint near Termez. A subsequent INL-funded project kicked off in June to upgrade security and cargo interdiction capabilities at the Termez River Port.

#### Kagan Disaster, Ongoing CENTCOM/ARCENT Assistance Efforts

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¶9. (C) A series of explosions rocked the Kagan Ammunition Depot--which stored nearly 200,000,000 rounds of ammunition--southeast of Bukhara on July 10, 2008. Despite an initial rejection of the Embassy's offer of assistance, we speculate that the GOU reversed its position once Ministry of Defense (MOD) officials conveyed the scale of the disaster and MOD's lack of sufficient equipment for clean-up efforts to senior members of the GOU. President Karimov also expressed his appreciation to the Ambassador for the offer of USG assistance and indicated that this would be very helpful.

MOD leaders have asserted that they need help dealing with the remaining 70-80 percent of the depot's unexploded munitions. They have established a 300-man sapper/engineering battalion to address the problem and project that the site will require a clean-up effort lasting at least one year. CENTCOM/ARCENT representatives are currently facilitating the delivery of over 180 metal detectors and the movement of a 5-man Military Training Team to Kagan. DAO Recommendation: The 2008 CENTCOM Uzbekistan Security Assistance Plan had two EOD-related training events.

The Kagan Depot disaster highlights the opportunity to discuss many more such events.

#### Foreign Policy

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¶10. (C) While Uzbekistan belongs to a variety of regional security organizations including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Uzbekistan's often half-hearted participation in these underscores its continuing wariness of such fora. Uzbekistan has not

actively participated in CSTO military exercises, and President Karimov has vowed that Uzbekistan's policy on Afghanistan will never be filtered through the CSTO. Uzbekistan sees some value in security and economic cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and is host to the organization's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, but has refrained from active participation in many of the SCO's military/security activities. Uzbekistani officials have indicated their strong opposition to Iranian membership in the organization and have told us that they would oppose any anti-Western initiatives within the framework of the organization.

¶11. (C) Disputes over access to water and Uzbekistan's perception that its neighbors are not doing enough to combat the spread of drugs, terrorism, and contraband into the country fuel tension between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan continues to maintain that water is not a commodity and that water allocation should be based on agricultural needs and population levels. Cotton exports still generate the bulk of Uzbekistan's foreign currency earnings, and Tashkent fears the effects of a reduction in water flows on its cotton harvest. Indeed, Uzbek officials have complained that the upstream countries have been releasing too much water in the winter (to generate electricity), and not enough in the summer, which deprives Uzbekistan of the water it needs. In particular, Uzbekistan opposes any upstream projects--such as the planned Kambarata and Rogun hydropower projects in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, respectively--that would provide the upstream states with greater control over water flows.

#### State of Play Within the Ministry of Defense

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¶12. (C) Despite very encouraging and cordial CENCTOM/DAO-MOD Action Officer Working Group meetings in Tashkent in April, a strange silence followed from MOD contacts. They later indicated that all future communications with MOD would require diplomatic notes addressed to the MFA, in place of direct DAO-MOD communication. MFA contacts believed the order had come from Uzbekistan's National Security Service. President Karimov later overturned this requirement during a recent meeting with the Ambassador. Defense Minister Mirzayev raised the possibility of a military intelligence exchange in May 2008, and we ask that you engage on this possible exchange with Mirzayev or his proxy directly--this visit is an excellent opportunity for the ACDR to engage the Ministry of Defense to establish a vigorous intelligence exchange program focusing on Afghanistan.

#### Counternarcotics and Other Security Cooperation

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¶13. (C) In Fall 2007, GOU officials began to hint that they would welcome the resumption of cooperation with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which suspended its activities early in 2007 due to limited effectiveness in working with the host government. DEA officials traveled to Tashkent in April 2008 and had productive meetings with officials from several partner agencies. Following up on the positive signals, the Embassy submitted a diplomatic note formally proposing the reestablishment of a DEA office. Disappointingly, the belated response from the Government of Uzbekistan rejected the proposal; MFA officials, however, explained that up to three DEA special agents would be authorized to augment the Embassy staff, but only as "U.S. Diplomats" assigned to the Embassy Political Section. DEA is still considering this highly unusual proposal, but it suggests that some influential Government of Uzbekistan officials remain opposed to resumption of cooperation on counternarcotics affairs. We ask that you follow up on the possibility of DEA returning during your meetings with the Government of Uzbekistan.

Further mil-to-mil security cooperation points that we recommend the Acting Commander address with counterparts during this visit:

- Propose SOCCENT re-engage Uzbekistan by offering counternarcotics riverine patrol boat training in November 2008 for the 14 patrol boats they delivered to the Border Guards in 2007, which would follow similar U.S.-provided contractor training in early spring 2008. Uzbekistan's MOD will sign letters of recommendation for medical supplies and boat training needs just prior to ACDR's arrival. J5 Desk Officer Major Schupay will meet with the MOD team regarding this issue on 26 August.

- Recommend ACDR engage State Commission for Drug Control Deputy Chair Kamol Dusmetov and MOD representatives on joint counternarcotics cooperation. Dusmetov's office has recently agreed to establishing a counternarcotics program with CENTCOM.

¶14. (C) Uzbekistan possesses a world-class set of radiation portal monitors--27 total at various points of entry on Uzbekistan's borders--installed by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) WMD-PPI project. The GOU shared data with us from this system during a November 2007 seizure of radioactive materials bound for Iran. In recent months, DTRA and Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) projects have provided Uzbekistani authorities with additional radioisotope identification devices that have strengthened Uzbekistan's ability to detect and interdict materials of proliferation concern, and ongoing INL projects are helping to train law enforcement officers on trafficking in persons issues and are improving the capabilities of Uzbekistan's main forensic laboratory. Uzbekistan has recently joined the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and participates in the Proliferation Security Initiative.

#### Human Rights: Keeping Uzbekistan on Track

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¶15. (SBU) The issue of human rights continues to be the most important challenge to improved relations with Uzbekistan. The country has taken several positive steps in the past year, including allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to restart prison visits; adopting new anti-human trafficking legislation which increases protections for victims; adopting two International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions on child labor; abolishing the death penalty; increasing the independence of the judiciary by implementing a new "habeas corpus" law; and releasing several political prisoners. In addition, though repressive measures against suspected Muslim extremists continue, they seem to have abated somewhat. The Government of Uzbekistan appears to have recognized a need to encourage the growth of moderate Islam, and the result has been a drop in the appeal of radical alternatives.

¶16. (SBU) The restart of ICRC prison visits was an especially important step forward, as a majority of the country's human rights abuses occur behind prison walls. Several human rights activists have since reported improving conditions at several prisons across the country. We believe that Admiral Fallon, who visited the ICRC while visiting Tashkent in February, was instrumental in convincing Uzbekistan to come to terms with the ICRC on restarting prison visits in March for an initial six-month trial period.

¶17. (SBU) Lately, however, Uzbekistan is threatening to backslide on human rights, potentially complicating other aspects of the relationship as well. For example, in the past few months, Uzbekistan has run documentaries on state-television attacking Radio Free Europe reporters and religious minorities; imprisoned three Jehovah's Witnesses; and detained a prominent journalist and activist in Karakalpakstan. We also have seen a recent up-tick in harassment of activists and religious minorities in several regions of the country.

¶18. (SBU) Uzbekistan still seems to believe that it can isolate discussion of human rights from other areas of the



relationship; we need to reinforce that it cannot. Progress on security and other types of cooperation must go hand-in-hand with progress on human rights. We believe that by raising a few specific human rights cases, you will help reinforce this idea with Uzbekistan, as well as have a positive impact on those cases.

¶19. (SBU) We ask that you praise Uzbekistan for allowing ICRC to restart prison visits and encourage them to continue cooperation with ICRC past the initial six-month trial period. We also would like you to express concern over reports of the deteriorating health of political prisoners Sanjar Umarov and Erkin Musaev and ask that Uzbekistan consider releasing both men on medical grounds.

#### Economy Strong, but Little Trickle-Down

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¶20. (SBU) Uzbekistan's macroeconomic performance continues to be strong. According to official GOU figures, in 2007 the economy grew 9.5 percent, and the country had a large current account surplus corresponding to 19 percent of GDP. The balance of payments continued to be strong with a surplus of USD 7.5 billion. The official debt ratio is now 17-18 percent of GDP and is likely to fall below 15 percent in the next few years. Uzbekistan practices a policy of "import substitution" that helps to insulate it from international financial markets.

¶21. (SBU) In 2008, the Government of Uzbekistan hopes to maintain an eight percent growth rate, largely from exports and industrial production. Although assessing the Uzbekistani economy as strong, the International Monetary Fund believes Uzbekistan's predictions for economic growth in 2008 to be overly optimistic.

¶22. (SBU) The benefits of Uzbekistan's strong macroeconomic performance are slow to be seen in the lives of Uzbekistani citizens. Although gross national income per capita is growing, the official inflation estimate of 6.5 percent contrasts with World Bank estimates that show the cost of living rising by 20 percent and more annually. Ranking among the five most corrupt countries in the world, Uzbekistan has a shadow economy that accounts for 20 percent of GDP by official estimates and by up to 45-50 percent of GDP in independent assessments. According to the World Bank, over a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line and is able to spend less than USD 1.1 per day. Nevertheless--largely due to underemployment--unemployment is a low 0.75 percent according to government figures and eight percent according to the International Labor Organization. As much as 9-18 percent of Uzbekistan's GDP comes in the form of remittances from workers who have migrated abroad, largely to Kazakhstan and Russia.

¶23. (SBU) Enhancing financial mediation and confidence in the banking system, as well as improving the business climate--including through the liberalization of trade and payments--are crucial if Uzbekistan is to achieve the government's ambitious growth objectives and create much-needed jobs for this young population. Great legal predictability is needed. Foreign investors have complained that Uzbekistani courts do not always honor contractual arbitration agreements. At the same time, the General Motors-UzAvtoprom joint venture is off to a good start, and GM is now considering a substantial expansion of its operations in Uzbekistan.

#### Action Summary

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¶24. (C) We ask that you raise the following issues during your meetings with GOU officials:

(1) A possible October 2008 visit of J4 CC BG Dowd to Uzbekistan to discuss a potential U.S.-Uzbekistan NGLOC agreement based on the pending NATO and existing German agreements.

(2) Additional EOD-related training events to complement the 2008 CENTCOM Uzbekistan Security Assistance Plan.

(3) Establishment of a vigorous bilateral intelligence exchange program focusing on Afghanistan.

(4) The possibility of DEA returning to Uzbekistan, and other joint counternarcotics cooperation.

(5) Counternarcotics riverine patrol boat training in November 2008.

(6) Encouragement of continued Uzbekistan-ICRC cooperation past the initial six-month trial period.

(7) Expressing concern over the health of political prisoners Sanjar Umarov and Erkin Musaev and requesting that the GOU release both men on medical grounds.  
BUTCHER